

Election In Jeremiah and Romans

Jeremiah 18:1-12; 19:1-2b, 10-11; Romans 9:6-24

- I. Given everything that's been happening the last few months, you've probably heard more than you ever wanted to hear about **elections**.
 - A. Well, bear with me, because election is our topic for today—election in Jeremiah 18, and Paul's use of it in Romans 9.
 - B. Rich asked me if I wanted to talk about it, because I've done a lot of thinking and some writing about it.
 - C. I hope you'll hang in with me this morning, because I think you'll find that election in God's perspective is more **encouraging** than much of the news we've had during this past election season.
 - D. Election in the Bible has to do with **God choosing people**.
 1. But **who** does God choose, and for **what**?
 2. That's what we're going to look at this morning.
 - E. I'm going to make **three main points** about election in Jeremiah, with a **bonus point** for Romans:
 1. Election is corporate.
 2. Election is missional—that is, it means being called to a task or mission.
 3. Election is conditional.
 4. Bonus: Election is now in Christ.
 - F. **Let's pray.**

- II. Here's the **situation** in Jeremiah:
 - A. As we've seen so far, God has called the prophet to **warn Judah** about God's coming judgment.
 1. Israel and Judah were **chosen** by God (**elected**) to a **covenant relationship** with God.
 2. God would protect and bless them, and in return, they were supposed to honor God, follow God's laws, and be a witness to other nations.
 3. But Judah, just like Israel, has turned away from God to follow idols, and they've been piling up sins.
 4. Jeremiah is their **last chance**; if they don't repent, they'll go into exile just like the northern kingdom Israel did.
 5. Now God sends Jeremiah to the potter's house to witness a kind of **visual parable**, a story with a message.

 - B. Here's the passage in Jeremiah 18 and 19 (NIV): **18:1** This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²“Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message.” ³ So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel.

⁴ But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.

- C. ⁵ Then the word of the LORD came to me. ⁶ He said, "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel. ⁷ If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, ⁸ and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. ⁹ And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, ¹⁰ and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.
- D. ¹¹ "Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, 'This is what the LORD says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.' ¹² But they will reply, 'It's no use. We will continue with our own plans; we will all follow the stubbornness of our evil hearts.'"
- E. **19:1** This is what the LORD says: "Go and buy a clay jar from a potter. Take along some of the elders of the people and of the priests ² and go out to the Valley of Ben Hinnom, near the entrance of the Potsherd Gate. . . . ¹⁰ "Then break the jar while those who go with you are watching, ¹¹ and say to them, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter's jar is smashed and cannot be repaired. They will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room.'
- F. Some people look at this passage and say that it shows that God **ordains everything** that happens.
1. They say it's all about **predestination**.
 2. In this view, known as **Calvinism**, after John Calvin, God causes everything that happens in the world, either directly or indirectly.
 - a. Nothing ever happens contrary to God's will, and no one can do anything to oppose God's will.
 - b. As part of this, God **picks certain individuals to save** and plans never to save the rest of humanity.
 3. That's what **election** means to Calvinists: God picking individuals to save and leaving the rest to be condemned.
 4. God's decision isn't based on anything about the people's character or actions; it's based solely on his choice.
 - a. In fact, he **decided the fate** of every individual who would ever live before he even created the world.
 - b. There's nothing anyone can do to change their fate.
 5. So Calvinists say that election is **individual**, it means being chosen for **salvation**, and it's **unconditional**, meaning nothing can change it.
 6. Calvinists say that this passage proves their perspective.
 - a. If God is the potter and Judah is the clay, we know that clay can't do anything. The clay is inert.
 - b. The only person with any say in what happens is the potter.

- c. If the potter has decided to destroy a clay pot, there's nothing the pot can do about it.
- 7. The people of Judah respond like **Calvinists**: Too bad, so sad, we're helpless to change our situation. V. 18:12: We'll just go on following the desires of our evil hearts.
 - a. But that isn't what God is saying in this passage.
 - b. In fact, it's the **opposite** of what God is saying.

III. Let's take a closer look.

A. The **Calvinists are right** about one thing:

1. Just like a potter creates and shapes a pot, God has created and shaped Judah.
2. When a pot—or a nation—doesn't turn out right, the creator has the right to take action.
3. God and Israel (including Judah) were in **covenant** together, but both Israel and Judah had broken that covenant over and over again.
4. So God has the right to bring **judgment**. That stipulation is written into the covenant itself.
 - a. God tells Jeremiah to symbolize the coming judgment by **breaking a clay jar**.
 - b. This is one of those weird **symbolic actions** God tells his prophets to do.
 - c. Jeremiah does it to show the people that God is going to **break** the nation of Judah just like Jeremiah has broken the jar.
5. But that's where things get **interesting**.

B. God **doesn't act like a Calvinist**.

1. God does NOT tell them that their fate is sealed.
2. Instead, he offers **hope**.
3. Just like a potter, God reserves the right to **change his plans** for the clay.
 - a. If a pot doesn't turn out the way the potter planned, he'll do something else with it.
 - b. He will "shape it as seems best to him" (18:4).
4. Calvin's God **never** changes his plans, because he determines everything that happens. He decides everything, and everything happens just as he has decided.
5. But in this passage, God says he **does changes his plans**, depending on how people behave.

C. That's how God works with **people and nations**:

1. Jer 19 ⁷If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, ⁸and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. ⁹And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, ¹⁰and if it does evil

in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

2. So there's good news and bad news here:
 - a. The **good news** is that people and nations that are under judgment have the chance to repent. If they do, God won't bring judgment on them.
 - b. The **bad news** is that people and nations that are experiencing God's blessings can lose those blessings if they turn away from God to evil.
 - c. The second case applies to Judah: they've experienced God's covenant blessings, but they have broken the covenant. They will forfeit God's blessings if they don't repent.
 - d. God's point is that they have a **choice**; what they do with it is up to them.
 - e. The whole point of sending Jeremiah to the potter's house is to give Judah a chance to **repent**.

D. So what does this passage have to do with **election**?

1. Everything in this passage is based on the fact that God has a **covenant relationship** with Judah.
 - a. Just like Israel, Judah is God's **chosen people**.
 - b. That's what **election** is—being chosen, as a people, to belong to God and carry out God's mission in the world.
 - c. So, the **first point** is that election is **corporate**.
 - d. God chose Israel and Judah as a whole, not certain individuals.
 - e. The nation was chosen, so **the nation as a whole** will experience God's blessings or God's judgment.
2. This may seem weird to us, because we Americans are so **individualistic**.
 - a. When we elect people to public office, we elect individuals.
 - b. In other political systems, though, it's different.
 - c. In a parliamentary system, for example, voters may elect **whole parties**.
 - d. The country's leader, the prime minister, is then chosen by the party that gets the most votes.
 - e. So election in the Bible is more like that **parliamentary** system: God chooses a **people** to be his, to experience his blessings, and to carry out his mission.
 - f. Since that people has turned away from him, they will be judged.
3. The **second point** is that election is to a **task** or a **mission**.
 - a. When we elect someone to public office, we expect them to **do something**.
 - b. We don't expect them to sit around congratulating themselves on having been elected.
 - c. We expect them to do the job we elected them to do.
 - d. It's the same with Israel's election.
 - e. God expected Israel and Judah to abide by the covenant he established with them.

- 1) The people had **responsibilities** to fulfill—to God, to one another, and to other nations.
 - 2) Israel was to be a light to the Gentiles, to draw people to God.
 - 3) They had to maintain **loyalty** to God alone.
 - 4) They **failed** in all these things.
4. The third point is that election is **conditional**.
 - a. If somebody we've elected doesn't do their job, we can **recall** them, or in some cases **impeach** them.
 - b. Because Judah had broken their covenant with God, they were about to lose their blessings as God's chosen people.
 - c. Their relationship with God was not a **blank check** that meant they could do anything they wanted.
 - d. God expects his people to reflect his character.
 - e. He's incredibly **patient**; his long patience with Israel and Judah is proof of that.
 - f. And he's always willing to **forgive** if his people repent.
 - g. But he will not continue to bless people who are determined to reject him.
 - h. I'm reminded of what Paul says in Gal 6:7: "God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow."
 5. So in Jeremiah, election is **corporate, missional, and conditional**.
 6. God's **character** and **purposes** don't change, but he **changes his plans** for people when they change their behavior toward him.
 7. What about in the New Testament?

IV. In Romans, Paul uses this passage from Jeremiah to make a point about what God is doing **through Christ**.

- A. He's explaining his **gospel** to the church at Rome.
 1. In particular, as the **Apostle to the Gentiles**, he's explaining how Gentiles can be Christians without having to become Jewish first.
 2. God gave the **law** to Israel as his chosen people; having the law was what marked them out as God's special people.
 3. How then can Paul say that Gentiles don't have to obey it?
 4. Has God **broken his covenant** with Israel in order to let the Gentiles in?
 5. That's us, by the way—any of us who aren't ethnically Jewish.
 6. Paul says no. God hasn't broken his covenant.
 7. The **promise of blessing** God gave to Abraham and his descendants has been extended to the Gentiles **through Christ**.
- B. There's **a lot** to say about this passage, much more than we can look at this morning.
 1. I'll just try to make general sense of it and show how it connects to Jeremiah.

2. I'll read the passage in chunks and explain what Paul is saying (NIV):
- C. **9:6** ⁶ It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷ Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."^[b] ⁸ In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. ⁹ For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."^[c]
1. God's word—that is, his **promise** to bless Abraham and his descendants—has not failed.
 2. That's because Abraham's descendants aren't necessarily the people who are related to him by blood.
 3. His descendants are **people of the promise**—that is, people like Abraham who believe God's promises and act on them.
 4. In the case of Isaac and Ishmael, Isaac was the **son of the promise** (the promised son) rather than Ishmael.
 5. We are people of the promise, too, because we believe in **Jesus, God's promised Son**.
- D. ¹⁰ Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. ¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger."^[d] ¹³ Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."^[e] ¹⁴ What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."^[f] ¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy.
1. In the case of Jacob and Esau, Jacob was the **son of the promise**.
 - a. God's promise to bless Abraham's descendants would go through Jacob.
 - b. Those descendants became Israel, God's **chosen people**.
 2. God didn't do this because Jacob was somehow **better** than Esau.
 - a. Jacob was actually a bit of a con artist.
 - b. God simply decided to show **mercy** to Jacob, even though he didn't deserve it.
 - c. And God can show mercy to anyone he wants.
 3. Calvinists like to point to verse 13—"Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated"—and say, "See, this proves that God picks some individuals for salvation and rejects others."
 - a. But Paul isn't talking about saving individuals here.
 - b. He's talking about how God is carrying out a **grand plan** through history to save both **Jews** and **Gentiles**.
 - c. As part of that plan, he chose to work through Jacob rather than Esau.
 4. Verse 13 is a quote from Malachi 1:2-3 that actually refers to Israel and Edom, not the individuals Jacob and Esau.

- a. Even if this verse did refer to the individuals Jacob and Esau, God didn't literally **hate** Esau.
 - b. If we look back at Genesis to see what happened to these people, God gave Esau many **descendants** and **blessing**, just as he did for Jacob.
 - c. The only thing he didn't give Esau's family was the **promised land**.
5. Now Paul moves to a different example:
- E. ¹⁷ For Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."^[g]
¹⁸ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.
1. Why does **Pharaoh** show up in the middle of this family drama?
 2. It's because Pharaoh was a huge **obstacle** in the fulfillment of God's promise.
 3. If Pharaoh had had his way, Israel would never have reached the promised land.
 4. But God raised up Pharaoh to make a point: nothing can prevent God from **keeping his promises**.
 5. God hardened Pharaoh's heart to show that the most powerful person in the world couldn't stand against God's power in **setting his people free**.
 6. God had **mercy** on Jacob and **hardened** Pharaoh so that his **promise** would continue.
- F. ¹⁹ One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?" ²⁰ But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"^[h] ²¹ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?
1. Paul imagines that someone will react just like **Jeremiah's hearers** did:
 - a. If God is so powerful that not even Pharaoh can resist him, what chance do we have?
 - b. God will do what he wants, and we're helpless to change it.
 2. Paul's answer is surprising: "Yeah, you're right. God can do whatever he wants."
 3. The critical question is this: **What has God done in order to keep his promises?**
 4. For his answer to this question, Paul goes to **Jeremiah** and the **potter's house**.
 5. Everyone would agree that a potter can take a big lump of clay and use it to make some dishes for everyday use and other dishes for special occasions.
 - a. He doesn't have to use that whole lump of clay for the same purpose.
 - b. Notice that both types of pottery are useful; they're just useful for different things. Some of it has a special purpose.
 6. He's thinking of **Israel and the Gentiles**, as he has been through the whole chapter.
 - a. Israel is represented by the pottery made for special purposes.
 - 1) Remember that they're supposed to be a light to the rest of the world.
 - 2) So they're like the wedding china that you show off to guests.
 - b. The Gentiles are represented by the pottery for common use.

- 1) They're still valuable.
 - 2) They're just the everyday dishes rather than the wedding china.
- G. ²² What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— ²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?
1. Who are these **objects of wrath** that Paul mentions?
 - a. Calvinists would say that they're the individuals God has decided not to save.
 - b. But remember that Paul is talking about Israel and the Gentiles.
 2. Paul has gone to great lengths in Romans 1-5 to show that both Israel and the Gentiles—that is, both the wedding china and the everyday dishes—have become **unclean**.
 - a. They've been **ruined by sin** and are **unfit for use**.
 - b. They're now **objects of wrath** fit only for **destruction**.
 3. In the Old Testament, pottery that had become unclean was supposed to be **broken and thrown away**.
 - a. Just like Jeremiah **broke that jug** to symbolize God's judgment on Judah.
 - b. So both Israel and the Gentiles are fit only for **judgment**.
 4. **BUT** instead of bringing judgment, God **changes his plans**.
 5. He invites them to become **objects of mercy** instead, by calling both Israel and the Gentiles to experience his mercy in **Christ**.
 6. So God the potter is taking those messed up pottery dishes and preparing them for **glory**, making them into **artworks** the likes of which the world has never seen.
 7. And **we who believe in Jesus** will be among them.
- H. So what is Paul saying about **election**?
1. We who are Gentiles are **beneficiaries** of God **changing his plans** to bring judgment.
 - a. We would have been **lost** without Christ.
 - b. But now we can be part of God's **chosen people**.
 2. In the New Testament, as in Jeremiah, election is **corporate**.
 - a. Election is a way of talking about the **people of God**, the church, composed of both Jews and Gentiles.
 - b. We're all **elect** or **chosen** because we're part of the **chosen people**, who have a covenant relationship with God.
 - c. In our case, the covenant is the **New Covenant**.
 3. As in the old covenant, election under the New Covenant is **missional**.
 - a. Just as in the Old Testament, God's chosen people are supposed to show his character and be involved in his mission in the world.
 - b. We're supposed to tell the world about Jesus, God's **promised Son**, who provides the way that *anyone* can become part of God's chosen people.

4. And just as with Israel, election is still **conditional**.
 - a. In order to **join** God's **chosen people**, we have to respond to God's invitation to **repent** and **believe** in his promises—especially in his **promised Son, Jesus**.
 - b. We have a choice, and we're responsible for what we decide.
 - c. Then, as **members** of God's chosen people, we have **responsibilities**.
 - d. We have to honor God, follow his commands, be loyal to him, and repent when we mess up.
 - e. If we **reject God** and **refuse to repent**, God will not continue to bless us.
 - f. Fortunately, we have Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and one another to help us remain faithful.

V. So here are some takeaways from Jeremiah and Romans:

- A. The **church** is **important**.
 1. It's not an afterthought; it's a continuation of God's chosen people.
 2. We're among the **elect** because we're part of it.
- B. As part of the elect, we have a **job** to do! Namely, we should do the things Jesus would do if he were here.
- C. Our relationship with God isn't a **blank check** to do whatever we want.
- D. But God is **merciful** to those who don't deserve it. That includes us.
- E. When we mess up or stray, God is patient with us.
- F. There is always **hope** for someone who repents.